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The role of the United Nations system in implementing the ministerial declaration of the high-level segment of the 2011 substantive session of the Economic and Social Council

Role of the United Nations system in implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to education

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report presents an overview of the activities carried out by the United Nations system in ensuring follow-up to the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council in 2011. The report reviews joint initiatives taken by entities of the United Nations system and their partnerships with other actors, including analyses of existing partnerships and proposals to enhance those partnerships with civil society and the private sector. Such efforts, which may be transformational, are also presented in the context of an ongoing reflection on the international agenda in this area, including emerging trends, possible targets and new concepts on the content of educational policy, which include an increased focus on the quality of education and the need to improve the nexus between education, training and the world of work.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2008/29, the Economic and Social Council decided that its coordination segment should be devoted to the review of the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the previous year's annual ministerial review. The 2012 coordination segment will therefore focus on the theme "Implementing the internationally agreed development goals and commitments in regard to education" and will review the role of the United Nations system in this regard.

2. The present report presents a review of the activities of the United Nations system in the field of education through the angle of coordinated and/or joint initiatives. It is based on contributions provided by United Nations agencies and offices. In particular, the role and the views of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), two major United Nations actors in this field, are highlighted. The report addresses how partnerships with other organizations of the United Nations system and non-United Nations actors have enhanced international action in this regard. Particular attention is given to those partnerships aimed at accelerating progress towards the achievement of Millennium Development Goal 2, Education for All, and related goals.

3. The United Nations is currently engaged in a forward-looking process to develop a system-wide vision and road map for the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. The outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in June 2012, in terms of sustainable development objectives and programmes may also have implications for the education for all goals. In view of this possibility, section IV of the report is devoted to a discussion of emerging trends, challenges and perspectives with regard to education and their potential impact on the nature of future international action.

II. Strengthening United Nations inter-agency partnerships and coordination mechanisms for education

A. The "Education for All" movement, a common platform for mobilizing stakeholders

4. The main mechanism through which United Nations agencies have developed and coordinated activities is the Education for All movement, which is a global commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. Since the convening of the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000, a number of strategic initiatives and cooperation frameworks have emerged, involving a broad range of stakeholders. In this process, the Education for All movement has become much more inclusive and participatory, engaging not just ministries of education but also representatives from all areas of society, from grass-roots organizations to global corporations.

5. The Education for All convening agencies are UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank. UNESCO was mandated to act as global coordinator of the Education for All movement and was given the responsibility for a series of coordination mechanisms, comprising the multi-stakeholder High-Level Group and

the Working Group on Education for All, which include mechanisms for specific groups of stakeholders. Among its other achievements, the High-Level Group is responsible for the launching of the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report* and the establishment of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education for All.

6. Changes have appeared in the global context surrounding the movement. In 2011, based on criticism that the above-mentioned mechanisms had not succeeded in mobilizing sufficient high-level support, UNESCO made a review of the coordination architecture and put a revised mechanism in place. The objectives of the new mechanism are to ensure stronger linkages between national, regional and global activities on Education for All; to mobilize high-level political support through an annual high-level forum; to assess progress at an annual global meeting; and provide strategic guidance through a steering committee. All stakeholders are included in these structures to ensure effectiveness, ownership and accountability.

7. Global and regional coordination of the Education for All movement has facilitated the sharing of information, expertise and networks among countries, different United Nations agencies and other involved stakeholders. A division of roles and responsibilities has emerged, with UNESCO facilitating the monitoring of progress towards the Education for All goals through the annual *Education for All Global Monitoring Report*. In addition, the Global Partnership for Education (the former Fast Track Initiative) has focused on mobilizing funding; a number of other thematic partnerships and initiatives have focused on advocacy on specific aspects of the movement; and regional working groups have been established. For example, the Asia-Pacific working group includes the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and regional organizations such as the Asian Development Bank and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

B. Specific partnerships and initiatives

8. A number of partnerships and thematic initiatives that have been created since the holding of the World Education Forum in 2000, including multi-stakeholder partnerships with one or two lead agencies providing the secretariat/coordination mechanism. Each partnership tends to have its own governance system and to operate independently, providing opportunities for members to engage in policy-dialogue, knowledge creation and sharing, advocacy and the mobilization of support. Some thematic initiatives focus on specific groups of vulnerable children (for example the Global Task Force on Child Labour and Education for All), while others focus on international development themes and the content of education (for example the Inter-Agency Task Team on Education and the World Programme for Human Rights Education) and constraints on access to education (for example the School Fee Abolition Initiative and school feeding programmes).

9. Flagship partnerships and initiatives include the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, the Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities initiative, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies and the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003-2012. Some partnerships are discussed in greater detail below.

10. In 2002, the Global Partnership for Education was created to accelerate progress towards universal primary education. The partnership, which is a compact for financing policies and sector programmes for Education for All at the country

level, operates under the policy guidance of a Board of Directors, consisting of representatives of developing countries, donors, civil society, teachers unions, private sector and multilateral agencies. In November 2011, at a replenishment conference, approximately $1.54 billion was pledged for the initiative. The secretariat of the Partnership is supported by the World Bank and the Chair of the Board of Directors is hosted by UNESCO.

11. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, launched in Dakar in 2000, is one of the original EFA flagship programmes. The Initiative works to improve the quality and availability of girls' education. With UNICEF as the lead agency, the Initiative is a network of partners at all levels and is guided by a Global Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of international organizations, civil society, private sector and donors. It aims at closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education by 2015.

12. The United Nations Adolescent Girls Task Force, co-chaired by UNFPA and UNICEF, in partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the World Health Organization (WHO), mobilizes partners to promote the rights of girls, including to health and education, and to promote girl leaders. In the field of education, it focuses on quality education and school completion for girls, in particular for their transition from primary to post-primary education and training.

13. The Evidence and Data for Gender Equality Initiative, co-managed by UN-Women and the Statistics Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, on Collaboration with Member States, the World Bank, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which seeks to advance efforts to obtain comparable gender indicators on education, employment, entrepreneurship and assets, will develop a database for international data and metadata compilation in those fields.

14. The Focusing Resources on Effective School Health Initiative provides an inter-agency framework within which the World Food Programme (WFP), WHO and UNICEF work together to achieve more child-friendly schools through health-related school policies, the provision of safe water and sanitation, skills-based health education and school-based health and nutrition services. School meal programmes, for example, act as a safety net for poor families and help keep children, in particular girls, in school. Under the framework, WFP has provided meals as a platform for WHO de-worming programmes that make sure that vital nutriments from food are well absorbed and utilized for growth and development; and WFP and the World Bank have established a partnership on "rethinking school feeding for the twenty-first century", which is aimed at promoting a worldwide transition towards nationally owned and resourced school feeding programmes.

15. Led by UNICEF and Save the Children, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Education Cluster serves to enhance the capacity and preparedness of humanitarian personnel and Government authorities in coordinating and managing educational programmes in emergencies.

16. The Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, an open global network of representatives from various sectors, has recognized the fact that, in

periods of conflict, education helps build social capital and cohesion and gives children a sense of structure and normalcy, while protecting them from harm, abduction and recruitment into armed groups. In the aftermath of conflict, education is a key element for reconciliation and the rebuilding of trust. School feeding and other services are used to increase the impact of enhanced education. In addition, the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack is a unique inter-agency coalition formed in 2010 to address the problem of targeted attacks on educational facilities during armed conflict.

17. Education for Rural People is a global partnership launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNESCO to remove barriers to poor people, including the urban-rural divide in knowledge, education and training. The partnership has secured a place for education for rural people on national and global policy agendas and has successfully promoted intersectoral cooperation between ministries of agriculture and education.

18. The United Nations Inter-Agency Committee for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) is a collaboration mechanism that brings together 22 United Nations agencies to focus on the educational dimensions of sustainable development and to promote a common vision for the United Nations system. It seeks to emphasize the importance of education for sustainable development and its implications in all areas of education. For example, specific activities are carried out by United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in the field of health, water, sanitation and hygiene education to promote value-based water education.

19. The Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children, led by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, aims to reduce the number of out-of-school children and to address disparities in access and attendance through policies and strategies for increased school participation for marginalized children, based on country-specific analysis of bottlenecks and barriers to school participation in 26 countries. In collaboration with the World Bank, UNICEF also began developing a "simulation for equity in education" model, which includes a database of effective strategies for improving both access and learning outcomes for groups of excluded children, as well as a means to project the marginal costs of such interventions (addressing both demand and supply).

20. The School Fee Abolition Initiative, launched in 2005 by UNICEF and the World Bank, is focused on: developing an evidence base on the impact of the abolition of school fees; providing technical support to countries; and enhancing the global and national policy dialogue on the subject. Fee abolition has already resulted in a substantive increase in total enrolment, particularly in African countries, and an improved ratio of girls to boys enrolled in primary school.

21. The Inter-agency Group on Technical and Vocational Education and Training comprises ILO, OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO. Regional banks and organizations have also joined the Group. The Group has provided key inputs to the plan of action of the Training Strategy and Human Resource Development of the Group of 20. Joint country reviews and round-table discussions for a broad spectrum of stakeholders have also been organized. Two technical groups have been established on the definition of key indicators for monitoring and evaluation of and on "Greening technical and vocational education and training and skills development".

22. At the country level, the United Nations "Delivering as one" process has provided a platform for better coordination in several countries, promoting a division of labour based on the comparative advantages of the different United Nations agencies. In addition, local donor coordination groups have undertaken donor mapping exercises and supported countries in the development and implementation of education sector plans, including through the provision of funding. An interesting example of inter-agency partnership at the field level is the "Promoting civic values and life skills for adolescents through education" initiative developed by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UNESCO and UNFPA in Iraq, with the strong involvement of national counterparts. The programme assists in the development of a civic educational curriculum, which aims at reducing the risk of ethnic and sectarian violence.

23. The global coordination and the various partnerships and initiatives on Education for All have sustained political momentum and commitment to goals and have influenced the global agenda. Nevertheless, the UNESCO review of the coordination architecture found that country-level debates on key issues are not adequately reflected in the process of agenda-setting at the global level.

C. Global Initiative on Education launched by the Secretary-General

24. Recognizing that education is the main building block of society, the Secretary-General has made education one of the priorities of his action plan for the next five years and has decided to launch a new Global Initiative on Education. The objectives are to put education at the heart of the social, political and development agendas and to mobilize additional support for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals in education.

25. The initiative is also based on the recognition of the central role of education in making individuals more resilient to sudden changes caused by global crises. Education is the backbone of recovery. Education budgets must therefore be protected, even in the current era of austerity measures. Attempting to make savings in education budgets harms economies for years into the future. In the last 10 years, the advances in increasing enrolment and reducing gender disparities at the primary school level were the direct result of strong political leadership and commitment, combined with sound policies and sufficient financing.

26. As 2015, the critical year for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals approaches, the Global Initiative is expected to give greater impetus to the worldwide movement for education and to: (a) raise the political profile of education and rally together a broad spectrum of actors; (b) spur a global movement to achieve quality, relevant and inclusive education for all by 2015, with concomitant gains for the broad development agenda, including the Millennium Development Goals; and (c) generate additional and sufficient funding through sustained advocacy efforts.

27. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has established a steering committee for the initiative that includes the convening agencies of the Education for All movement and UN-Women to work on its focus, targets and strategy. The three priority areas of the initiative are to: (a) put every child in school; (b) improve the quality of education; and (c) foster global citizenship. The Secretary-General

will launch the initiative in the margins of the sixty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

III. Enhancing partnerships between the United Nations and other stakeholders

28. While Governments are responsible and accountable for the provision of quality basic education, it is widely recognized that non-State actors also have an important role to play. Their contributions can take different forms, from service providers to innovators, advocates and policy partners. Partnerships between the United Nations and other stakeholders have increased during the past decade. The level of engagement of civil society and the private sector in policy dialogue can be seen as one of the successes of the global coordination of the Education for All movement.

29. United Nations entities have strengthened the representation of key stakeholders in policy debates and activities. In addition to the more thematically focused partnerships and initiatives mentioned above, UNESCO has established formal mechanisms for collaboration with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All), the private sector (the Global Partnership for Education) and the Network of Parliamentarians for Education and a Culture of Peace. In addition, the "E9 Initiative" is a mechanism for South-South cooperation among the nine most populous developing countries.

A. Overview of partnerships with different categories of actors

Regional and subregional organizations in the field of education

30. Strong partnerships have been established with a wide range of regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations from all continents, which play a central role in monitoring progress on Education for All, the Millennium Development Goals related to education, including regional education goals, and in promoting accountability. Structures have also been put in place at the level of the regional economic commissions to promote education, and partnerships with regional development banks have helped strengthen outreach and capacity.

31. Examples of regional partnerships include cooperation between UN-Habitat and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization, the African Institute of Sathya Sai Education and international NGOs to implement water education-related projects at the country level. As for the regional commissions, the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Strategy for Education for Sustainable Development serves as the regional implementation pillar of the strategy and promotes multi-stakeholder partnerships in Europe.

32. Partnerships through South-South cooperation have recently increased. For example, a partnership between the Government of Brazil and WFP has led to the creation of the WFP Centre of Excellence against Hunger, which works with Governments from Latin America to strengthen national capacity for school feeding and other programmes. An innovative partnership between UN-Women and the Barefoot College (India) has helped train 25 African women, mainly illiterate grandmothers, from Liberia, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of

Tanzania as "solar engineers" for the installation and maintenance of solar panels and systems to electrify their homes and villages. The Barefoot College has also become the first civil society partner to join the UNESCO Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education in 2012.

Civil society

33. Increasingly, the United Nations system is engaging with civil society organizations to promote its development agenda. For example, the coordination mechanism for partnership with civil society established by UNESCO, the Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All, has increased in membership and scope, and now includes close to 300 national, regional and international member organizations. UNFPA and UNICEF have expanded their partnerships to include faith-based organizations and have developed specific tools to implement activities with such organizations on the ground.

34. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is the first United Nations programme to have formal representation for representatives of civil society on its governing body, the Programme Coordinating Board. The NGO delegations on the Board have been instrumental in incorporating the perspectives of civil society, including people living with HIV, within UNAIDS policies and programming. In the field of education, they have played a key role in supporting efforts to strengthen the incorporation of comprehensive sexuality education policies and programmes into its strategy for 2011-2015.

35. When partnering with United Nations entities, civil society organizations usually play several roles, including policy dialogue, advocacy and mobilization, monitoring, providing alternative services and developing innovative approaches, thereby strengthening their capacities. However, at the national level, the involvement of NGOs in meaningful policy dialogue is varied as there is still a reluctance to fully include them in decision-making processes.

36. United Nations institutions have also developed partnerships with civil society organizations through grants to implement specific projects. For example, UN-Women supports secondary and vocational education for women and girls in Africa and Asia through its Fund for Gender Equality.

Parliamentarians

37. Parliamentarians play a vital role by legislating education laws, approving national budgets that provide funds for education, monitoring Government spending and work and representing citizens and voters by voicing their concerns. Support from parliamentarians helps to enhance Education for All as a top priority on national agendas, including the promotion of education as a human right, the implementation of educational strategies and legislation, the mobilization of financial resources for education and the monitoring of progress in meeting the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals-related goals.

38. Four parliamentarian forums for education have been established, with UNESCO support: the Forum for African Parliamentarians for Education, the Forum of Arab Parliamentarians for Education, the Forum of Latin-American and Caribbean Parliamentarians for Education and the Forum of Asia Pacific Parliamentarians for Education. At the first session of the General Assembly of the

latter forum, which took place in Jakarta on 6 and 7 July 2010, delegates adopted an action plan to implement inclusive educational policies and to mobilize financial and human resources for Education for All in the next biennium.

Private sector

39. The private sector is not a new actor in the field of education. Although its role and functions continue to generate divisive discussions within the education community, there is a growing momentum to deepen and enhance its engagement in recent years, notably through public-private and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The number of partnerships for education between the United Nations and companies, business organizations or corporate foundations has multiplied during the past decade.

40. Technology companies have been particularly active within the Education for All movement. For example, UNESCO is partnering with Nokia, Microsoft, Intel and Cisco to promote the use of new technologies for teacher training, literacy, skills development and distance learning, as well as with specialized companies in other industries, such as Procter and Gamble, to increase women's and girls' literacy, and GEMS Education, to improve teacher training. The private sector also provides assistance in measuring learning achievement through innovative technology. For example, UNESCO and UNICEF have partnered with the Brookings Institution and the Hewlett Foundation to develop new learning metrics to inform quality goals. Under the umbrella of "education for sustainable development", partnerships with the private sector flourish, including in the area of multimedia teaching on sustainability.

41. In addition to bilateral partnerships on specific projects with individual companies or foundations, the United Nations system endeavours to develop broader innovative partnership platforms with different constituencies. In May 2011, UNESCO set up a Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education to galvanize support from various partners for girls' enrolment in secondary education and for women's literacy. This partnership brought in a number of private sector partners. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has also partnered with public and private entities to establish training and coaching programmes on entrepreneurship development for youth. Such programmes, which have been implemented in Tunisia and in countries in sub-Saharan Africa, are aimed at enabling youth to generate their own income in a context marked by massive youth unemployment and social and political instability.

42. UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have launched a joint initiative entitled "Partnerships for Education" to foster, inform and facilitate the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships for education. This coalition of public and private partners is committed to developing new and innovative models of partnerships in the education sector. Through the initiative, UNESCO and the World Economic Forum have identified and disseminated principles and successful models for such partnerships, strengthened the representation and support of private partners for the Education for All movement and built capacities for partnership development. The core outputs include: (a) the publication of a review on

partnership models in education;[1] (b) a manual to support the monitoring and evaluation of partnerships in the education sector;[2] (c) the creation of a web portal to increase the sharing of information and successful practices;[3] and (d) capacity development activities in Rwanda. Based on the experience of the past five years, the Partnership for Education initiative is currently in a phase of transition towards a global alliance of corporate partners for education, under the leadership of UNESCO.

B. Analyses of existing partnerships and ways to improve them

43. The expansion of partnerships in the education sector brings together new opportunities and challenges for the United Nations. Through increased dialogue and cooperation with other stakeholders, the Organization has leveraged innovation, funding, competencies, capacities and broader public support for education. Partnerships facilitate multidimensional engagement, including on the part of nutrition and health actors, in support of the broader educational goals, and therefore contribute to achieving greater results.

44. At the same time, the United Nations must skilfully manage the potential risks of partnerships, notably in terms of integrity, reputation, transaction costs and diluted focus on measurable impact. When partnering with these stakeholders, United Nations agencies need a clear strategy and methodology, strong partnering skills, a very good knowledge of the partners' legitimacy and activities in the field of education, as well as a robust analysis of the local context and educational settings. The following analyses are based on the recommendations contained in the report of the Secretary-General on enhanced cooperation between the United Nations and all relevant partners (A/66/320).

How to assess, identify and replicate successful partnership models in education?

45. By increasing experience and knowledge-sharing of successful or unsuccessful partnerships, for example through the United Nations-business website (www.business.un.org) and the Partnerships for Education online platform (www.unesco.org/pfore/), United Nations staff and partners can identify effective partnership practices and their success criteria. However, experience shows a lack of systematic collection of evidence on the impact of partnerships for education. The development and utilization of monitoring and evaluation frameworks are therefore critical, not only to track the performance and assess the outcomes of specific partnership programmes, but also to inform the development of other projects and initiatives. Impact evaluations should focus on the educational change the partnership programme has achieved. In addition, the evaluation process should possibly assess the cost-effectiveness of the partnership (though cost-benefit analysis), as well as the institutional change achieved within partner organizations.

46. The experience of UNICEF indicates that strong partnerships are critical for enhancing access to quality education for the most marginalized. In addition to

[1] A. Draxler, *New Partnerships for EFA: Building on Experience*, UNESCO-Institute for Educational Planning, World Economic Forum, 2008.

[2] N. Marriott, H. Goyder, *Manual for Monitoring and Evaluating Education Partnerships*, UNESCO-IIEP, 2009.

[3] www.unesco.org/pfore/.

traditional partnerships with donor countries, progress has been facilitated through partnerships at the country and regional levels across United Nations agencies, as well as through multilateral partnerships. For example, the UNICEF partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning has facilitated the integration of the "child-friendly school" approach into curricula of teacher training institutions in eight countries.

47. It is also important to analyse how partnerships have leveraged the synergies between the different Millennium Development Goals. This will help highlight the critical role that collaborative efforts to advance education can play in the final push for the achievement of the Goals. For example, in eastern and southern Africa, UNAIDS is leading an effort to mobilize regional and national actors to increase the provision of education and sexual and reproductive health services for young people, thereby fostering synergies across two Millennium Development Goals.

How to improve partner selection and engagement processes?

48. Before engaging in a partnership programme for education, it is essential to undertake a comprehensive needs assessment and mapping in order to identify the challenges to address, the actions required and the potential partners. The education sector is characterized by a wide range of non-State actors and stakeholders. In addition, the increase in the number of NGOs, teacher unions, parents' associations, philanthropists, corporate foundations and consulting firms can make the process of engaging partners somewhat complicated. Mapping is an important exercise, involving the relevant actors and programmes related to the core of the partnership, which is intended to avoid duplication and overlap with ongoing activities and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of potential partners, as well as the opportunities and possible risks in partnering. The partner selection process should look into a range of aspects, including: ethical chart; official registration; legal cases; experience, scope, scale and impact of previous activities in education; and nature and degree of relationship with the Government and other educational stakeholders.

What are the implications for the organizations of the United Nations system, including capacity-building and training of United Nations staff?

49. Engagement with outside partners can provide additional funding for education projects and programmes, bringing new perspectives and deepening the knowledge base, for example through the introduction of new technologies.

50. United Nations staff must be well prepared and equipped with the necessary partnering tools and skills to develop and manage a partnership programme. Organizations should have a clear partnership strategy with non-State actors, provide training and build capacities of staff on partnerships and create an enabling environment for improved coordination and cooperation between education specialists, partnership officers and legal affairs departments.

How can the United Nations system strengthen an enabling environment for partnerships?

51. Drawing upon its expertise and convening power, the United Nations can act as a facilitator and honest broker to enhance collaboration and partnerships between different parties. This can be particularly effective in building trust and confidence

between Governments and civil society actors. In addition, utilizing information and communications technologies and social media increases flexibility and allows for a growing sense of accountability in the process of achieving results.

IV. The United Nations development agenda and education: perspectives for the future

52. When considering emerging trends in education worldwide and perspectives for the future, the United Nations vision of the international educational agenda should acknowledge the diversity of global development situations and the specific challenges they pose for education, including the situation in middle-income and upper-income countries which may have achieved education-related Millennium Development Goals but that continue to face important challenges in this field.

53. In this context, it is important to mention the pressure on the United Nations system with regard to the achievement of the international education agenda set for 2015. The Millennium Development Goal framework, adopted one month after the adoption of the Dakar Framework for Action, challenged the Education for All movement as the sole reference for educational development at the global level and contributed to a narrowing of the international education agenda to universal primary education and gender equality. It is important to keep the broad vision of the Education for All goals in mind, including early childhood care and education, youth and adult literacy, vocational skills development and concern for the improvement of the quality and relevance of basic learning. Education for All encompasses lifelong learning in formal, non-formal and informal settings. These aspects need to be captured in the post-2015 development agenda.

A. Overview of the achievement of educational development goals

54. The world has witnessed steady progress towards achieving the education development goals (Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 and the Education for All goals), in particular towards universal education and gender parity at the primary level. Progress in education has been substantial, reflecting not only improvements in the expansion of educational opportunities but also in the equality of access to education for girls and boys. From 1999 to 2008, an additional 52 million children enrolled in primary school, and there was a 31 per cent increase in pre-primary education enrolment, benefiting 148 million children. In addition, the number of out-of-school children was cut in half in South and West Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, despite a large increase in the primary school-age population, enrolment ratios rose by one third.[4]

55. To a large extent the progress achieved demonstrates greater investment on the part of Government. Low-income countries have collectively increased the share of national income spent on education from 2.9 per cent to 3.8 per cent since 1999. Since the adoption of the 2011 Ministerial Declaration, there have been important advances and major commitments to the development of education worldwide. The recent pledge by the Global Partnership for Education to increase bilateral education

[4] See UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2011: The Hidden Crisis: Armed Conflict and Education*. UNESCO, Paris, 2011.

aid and improve access to education and the quality of education between 2011 and 2014 demonstrates the recognition of the need to focus efforts beyond access to quality learning outcomes.

56. Despite unprecedented commitments, partnerships and progress in improving school enrolment and in promoting gender equality, progress is uneven between and within regions and countries, and it is often too slow in view of the need to meet the 2015 deadline. Progress towards the goals has not been sufficient and fast enough to meet the target dates, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. The focus on accelerating progress comes at a time of particular international momentum and opportunity amidst the impact of lingering financial crises and increasing conflict and fragility. Globally, of all the Millennium Development Goals, those focused on education are the closest to being met, prompting some leaders to focus urgent attention elsewhere.[5] There is, however, a growing realization that, without renewed commitment and concerted action, countries may very well fall short of reaching Millennium Development Goals 2 and 3 and the Education for All goals.

B. Trends in international education development

57. Through monitoring of progress towards the Education for All goals and the education-related Millennium Development Goals, lessons have been drawn that can help define future perspectives, in particular:

(a) **Inequalities**: despite the rapid progress made in expanding access to formal basic education worldwide, significant inequalities between countries persist, and national averages in many countries mask striking inequalities in levels of educational attainment and outcomes. Factors contributing to marginalization in education, such as gender and geographic location, continue to interact with poverty, language, minority status, HIV and AIDS, age (particularly in the case of young adolescent girls) and disability to create "mutually reinforcing disadvantages", particularly in low-income and conflict-affected countries;

(b) **Conflict-affected countries**: the need to fulfil the right to education is greatest in humanitarian crises, particularly in conflict-affected poor countries where 28 million children are out of school (about 42 per cent of the world total). Gross enrolment ratios in secondary school are nearly 30 per cent lower in conflict-affected countries and are far lower for girls. Yet education receives just 2 per cent of all humanitarian aid. Increasingly worrisome are the trends indicating that many of the world's poorest countries and communities will face the double threat of climate change and violent conflict. Although studies have shown that increased levels of quality learning at the primary and secondary educational levels reduce conflict, many Governments have not prioritized education;[6]

(c) **Reaching the unreached**: with the growing recognition of the challenges of "reaching the unreached", there is a need to improve the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and location (such as household survey

[5] World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report: Improving the Odds of Achieving the MDGs*, Washington, D.C., 2011.

[6] Save the Children, *Where Peace Begins: Education's role in conflict prevention and peacebuilding*, Save the Children Alliance, London, 2008.

data) in order to better identify patterns and causes of school drop-out in order to design more targeted strategies for the most marginalized children, youth and adults;

(d) **Quality**: the expansion in access to basic formal education has shifted the focus from quantitative aspects of education, such as access and participation in formal education, to qualitative aspects, such as educational quality and learning achievement, including a more equitable social distribution of access to such education. It has also resulted in a growing demand for secondary, technical and higher education, putting the spotlight on issues of retention and transition between different levels of education and raising challenges of policy prioritization and resource distribution in this field;

(e) **Education for the workforce**: the financial crisis has made the issues of youth unemployment and skills development pressing challenges in many developed and developing countries. The number of unemployed young people totalled 75 million in 2010. While this figure is daunting, with the adoption of appropriate measures, the substantial population of unemployed youth may have the opportunity to make a significant contribution to national economic growth and performance over the long run. Continuing long-term investment in quality education and training is required if this is to be achieved, including: the provision of alternative education opportunities and enhanced learning competencies that are responsive to global changing markets; expansion of investment in secondary education, with particular attention to adolescent girls; and recasting educational content to better meet the demands of the workforce and other levels of education. Broad-based partnerships among Governments, employer organizations, trade unions and other stakeholders is also needed to promote decent work for young women and men;

(f) **Financing**: there is a growing awareness of the pressures being placed on the public financing of education and increasing interest in the more efficient use of those limited resources. With an increasing number of poor people living in newly emerging middle-income countries, there is a need for greater accountability in the investment of public resources for education and for ways to supplement those resources through greater fiscal capacity and new partnerships with non-State actors. Advocacy for increased official development assistance also remains crucial, in particular for the improvement of girls' education and access to education in rural areas and in fragile States.

58. The dynamics of international cooperation have significantly changed in the past decade, with a multiplication and diversification of development partners. This poses opportunities for increased development assistance to education, but also challenges in terms of coordination and alignment with national priorities, which need to be addressed on a continuing basis.

C. Reviewing the international education agenda

59. As we approach the 2015 target date, global processes are being initiated to review experience thus far and to begin defining the possible shape of future education agendas. There are several areas of discussion within the context of the current review of the Millennium Development Goals experience 2000-2015, including discussion of the format and content of the future development agenda and the ways in which they are interrelated.

60. In terms of process, some of the discussion has to do with the added value of setting targets at the international level on the ground that such "one-size fits all" global targets may be considered to be of greater or lesser relevance to countries depending on their specific development challenges. In the area of education, meaningful targets for an overall goal aimed at "improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills" (Education for All goal 6) can only be realistically set at the national level. This is based on the assumption that each country has its own evolving conceptualization of the quality of education in terms of the performance of the system and the relevance of learning in each specific development context. It is this conceptualization that would constitute the basis of national target-setting and subsequent selection of indicators to monitor progress in the realization of the overall global goal. At the same time, there is a need to ensure that the bar is not set too low and that national goals for quality meet certain standards.

61. Another lesson learned from the experience of global-target setting within the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All experience is that it encourages reporting of aggregate national data, thereby masking the extent of inequality and disparity within countries. Given the concern with equity and the increased focus on reducing widening inequality worldwide, national target-setting would allow for the reporting of data disaggregated by not only sex and location, but also other factors that can contribute to marginalization, such as age, ethnicity and disability. Efforts are also needed to challenge and minimize the portrayal of stereotypical roles for women and men that can restrain educational choices at all levels of education.

62. The need to monitor national progress on educational goals through more disaggregated data relates to a second dimension of the discussion on the Millennium Development Goals experience, which has to do with the focus on outcome indicators. With a combined concern for equity and quality of education, interest has gradually shifted to a focus on the results of the educational processes in terms of learning outcomes, including their social distribution. Seeing the international education agenda as unfinished business, a focus on learning, on what is actually learned (knowledge and skills), rather than on mere participation in educational processes, is also based on the recognition of the limits of traditional proxy indicators, such as pupil/teacher ratios, share of qualified teachers and average years of schooling, in gauging the quality and contribution of education to inclusive development.

63. With the recent emphasis on learning and the corollary interest in large-scale assessments of learning outcomes, the fact that current large-scale evaluations only measure a limited range of cognitive skills may be overlooked. In addition, learning assessments should be grounded in local contexts and needs if they are to be relevant for national educational processes. In addition, standardized assessments of learning and impact assessments are important business industries, and there is a risk that the dependence of the most aid-dependent countries on the developed countries for the design of such tools may be perpetuated.

64. It might be helpful, for instance, to place greater focus on process indicators at the country level, which may be better suited to report on: (a) national efforts made to monitor levels of learning, as well as their social distribution at various stages of

education, and (b) the use of such data in informing strategic interventions to improve the general levels of learning and ensure their more equitable distribution. Such process indicators would allow national education authorities to be held more accountable for the results of public investment in education. This would also help to capture the performance trajectory of countries. One of the drawbacks associated with the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All goals is that they focus primarily on national success in meeting target levels and do not adequately take into account the pace of progress. Consideration of the rate of improvement is important, in particular for countries making rapid headway but from a very low base level.

65. In addition, the current global economic crisis and the related massive unemployment rate for youth requires the building of strategic alliances to improve the supply of relevant education opportunities for youth and the demand for a skilled labour force. Strengthened collaboration between ILO, UNESCO, UNIDO and the World Bank is needed for a greater articulation between technical and vocational training and education, higher education and the world of work. In addition to improving employment opportunities for youth in the formal sector, there is a need for training and coaching programmes to assist them in identifying business opportunities with growth potential in their communities, accessing finance for start-ups and expanding their businesses.

66. Examples of successful vocational training include a United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) Quality Assurance for Tourism Education, Training and Research Programme in Africa, which was developed in partnership with six educational institutions to facilitate cooperation in this field between Africa and Europe. UNWTO has also supported a programme for tourism-friendly and eco-friendly schools, which seeks to use tourism as a positive tool to reduce poverty by providing a close interaction between the students and their environment and by providing them with specific training to become community leaders.

D. Beyond the international education agenda: emerging trends for the future of education

The exponential growth of information and its changing nature

67. With the continued development of knowledge societies, the rate of production and the volume of information continue to grow exponentially. Information is increasingly provided using audio, graphic and visual supports, and is less and less dependent on text-based transmission. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO), the past decade has witnessed a rapid expansion of international trade in education services, demonstrated by the increasing international mobility of students, which is estimated to have grown by over 80 per cent from 1999 to 2007. The number of students involved in online learning and other types of offshore programmes has also been growing steadily.

68. The exponential growth in the volume of information and its changing nature question the very notions of the authority of traditional bodies of knowledge controlled by legitimate educational institutions and an elite corps of specialists.

From a focus on teaching to increasing attention to learning

69. With formal education traditionally emphasizing teaching more than learning, education systems have focused on the transfer of information and knowledge from the teacher to the learner. Such a teacher-dependent education system is time-dependent, location-dependent and situation-dependent. With the multiplication of new information and communication technologies and digital media, sources of information and knowledge are becoming more diversified and accessible beyond the confines of formal education systems. Beyond the traditional curriculum-related questions of what to teach (learning content) and how to teach it (teaching/learning methods), the question is increasingly becoming when and where to teach and learn. Recognizing that learning is increasingly happening individually beyond formal educational settings, at different times and locations, the role of teachers will have to evolve from dispensers of information and knowledge to facilitators and enablers of learning.

70. The United Nations system has started to adapt its activities to respond to this major shift. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the emerging partnership on learning, which involves United Nations agencies (UNICEF and UNESCO), private foundations (for example, the Hewlett Foundation), development partners, think tanks and academic institutions, and international NGOs in the development of learning metrics to inform post-Millennium Development Goal quality goals, if in point of fact there is a global agreement on having such goals.

71. Specific reference should be made to the Education Reform Strategy launched on 5 October 2011 by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) on the occasion of World Teachers' Day. The reform aims to improve the effectiveness and relevance of the UNWRA education programme, which concerns half a million Palestine refugee children in some 700 schools. Based on a comprehensive external review, the heart of the reform is classroom practice and changing the dynamics of the learning process to address the needs of all children and students.

Beyond functional literacy

72. While progress continues to be made in reducing illiteracy worldwide and narrowing gender gaps, particularly among youth, essentially as a result of the expansion of access to formal education systems, there are still an estimated 760 million illiterate youth and adults.[4] Not only does illiteracy continue to represent a persistent challenge, but notions of what constitutes a minimum threshold of functional literacy are changing as a result of progress in science and technology. It is therefore important to consider the various forms of information and media literacy required for full integration into the contemporary knowledge society. Not only are the skills associated with the use of new digital media becoming more complex, but the vocabulary created to comprehend them is growing on an almost daily basis. Some have therefore argued that the distance between the functionally literate and the super literate is growing. Beyond minimalistic definitions of literacy and numeracy skills, educational development must address the issue of adequate information and media literacy for the digital age.

Lifelong learning: beyond classroom-centred paradigm of education

73. While a great deal of learning covered by formal education may take place at home, at school and elsewhere in the form of homework, reading and preparation for examinations, the physical space defined by the classroom remains a central feature of formal education systems at all levels of learning. Although the lifelong learning paradigm is not new,[7] recent developments in terms of the continuously quickening pace of technological and scientific development, an increasingly volatile job market, the exponential growth and changing nature of education, the gradual erosion of the monopoly of authority by traditional sources of knowledge, such as teachers, professors, specialists and the increasingly challenging task of forecasting the emergence of new professions and associated skills needs are all reinvigorating the relevance of lifelong education.

From a focus on the content of learning to the assessment and validation of learning

74. The growing recognition of the importance of learning and relearning taking place outside the formal education and training systems raises the issue of the assessment and validation of learning acquired through self-learning, peer-learning or learning on the job. From a traditional focus on the content of learning programmes and teaching/learning methods, the focus is now shifting to the assessment and validation of knowledge and skills, regardless of the ways in which they were acquired.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

75. **The present report testifies to the positive momentum within the United Nations system to promote the United Nations development agenda as it relates to education and the Education for All goals. It also illustrates that much more needs to be done in order to realize the right of everyone, including the poor, to education, while assisting countries in making the transition towards an improved quality of education and greater focus on learning. These efforts cannot be made by Governments and United Nations actors alone. Partnerships within the United Nations system as well as with other stakeholders are essential in order to maximize capacities and multiply the transformational power of all parties. Only through a coordinated and integrated approach can the immense challenges ahead be significantly taken up. The Global Initiative on Education of the Secretary-General can create a new momentum in this regard.**

76. **In reviewing the role of the United Nations system in the implementation of the international development goals and commitments with regard to education, the Economic and Social Council may wish to take into account the following recommendations:**

(a) **The United Nations system should be encouraged and given the means to raise the profile of the international education agenda and maximize educational results;**

[7] See UNESCO, *Learning to Be: A Holistic and Integrated Approach to Values Education for Human Development*, Paris, 1972.

(b) The United Nations system should support the efforts of the Secretary-General, including through the Global Initiative on Education, to spur a global movement to achieve quality, relevant and inclusive education for all by 2015, including the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All goals, with concomitant gains for the broad development agenda;

(c) Particular attention should be given to addressing factors of marginalization in education, such as gender, age, location and disability, with a special focus on reaching women and girls in rural areas;

(d) Concerted efforts are needed to improve the collection and analysis of education data disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and other relevant factors for effective policy design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;

(e) The United Nations system should place greater emphasis on supporting countries in minimizing the perpetuation of stereotypical roles for women and men that can restrain educational choices at all levels of education;

(f) Synergies should be sought between United Nations entities working in the food, health and education sectors in order to enhance enrolment, retention, participation and achievement of girls and boys and maximize interventions for the benefit of children;

(g) More should be done by all actors, particularly entities of the United Nations system present on the ground, to ensure the realization of the right to education in humanitarian crises, particularly in conflict-affected poor countries, and to make sure that it becomes an integral part of any early and longer-term recovery strategy;

(h) The issues of youth unemployment and skills development in the context of the financial crisis should find appropriate resonance in the work of the United Nations system and be supported adequately; collaboration among United Nations entities working in the economic and educational fields should be strengthened in order to facilitate greater articulation between technical and vocational training, higher education and the world of work and to promote entrepreneurship among youth;

(i) The United Nations system should be increasingly recognized as both a framework provider and a facilitator for partnerships with a wide range of actors, in particular non-governmental organizations and the private sector, with a view to building trust among different actors;

(j) The United Nations system should strengthen the enabling environment for partnerships, improve partner selection and engagement processes, place greater emphasis on impact, transparency, coherence, accountability and sustainability and develop the capacity of its staff to that end;

(k) The United Nations system should share good practices and lessons learned in partnerships on education in order to identify and replicate successful partnership models, maximize efficiencies and synergies and create conditions for effective scaling-up;

(l) The Council itself should continue to act as a platform for discussing partnerships and their role in implementing the United Nations development agenda in all its dimensions, particularly at the Council's coordination segment; such discussions should give strategic guidance in developing partnerships for key priority areas;

(m) When determining future policy options, it is important to have a broad vision that encompasses early childhood care and education, youth and adult literacy, vocational skills development and concern for the improvement of the quality and relevance of basic learning;

(n) Relevant United Nations entities should be encouraged to assess emerging trends in education, particularly the increased focus on learning and the use of information and communications technologies in education processes, and to analyse their implications for the form and content of educational policies at the national and global levels;

(o) Appropriate consideration should be given to the above dimensions in the processes devoted to the definition of the post-2015 United Nations development agenda.